

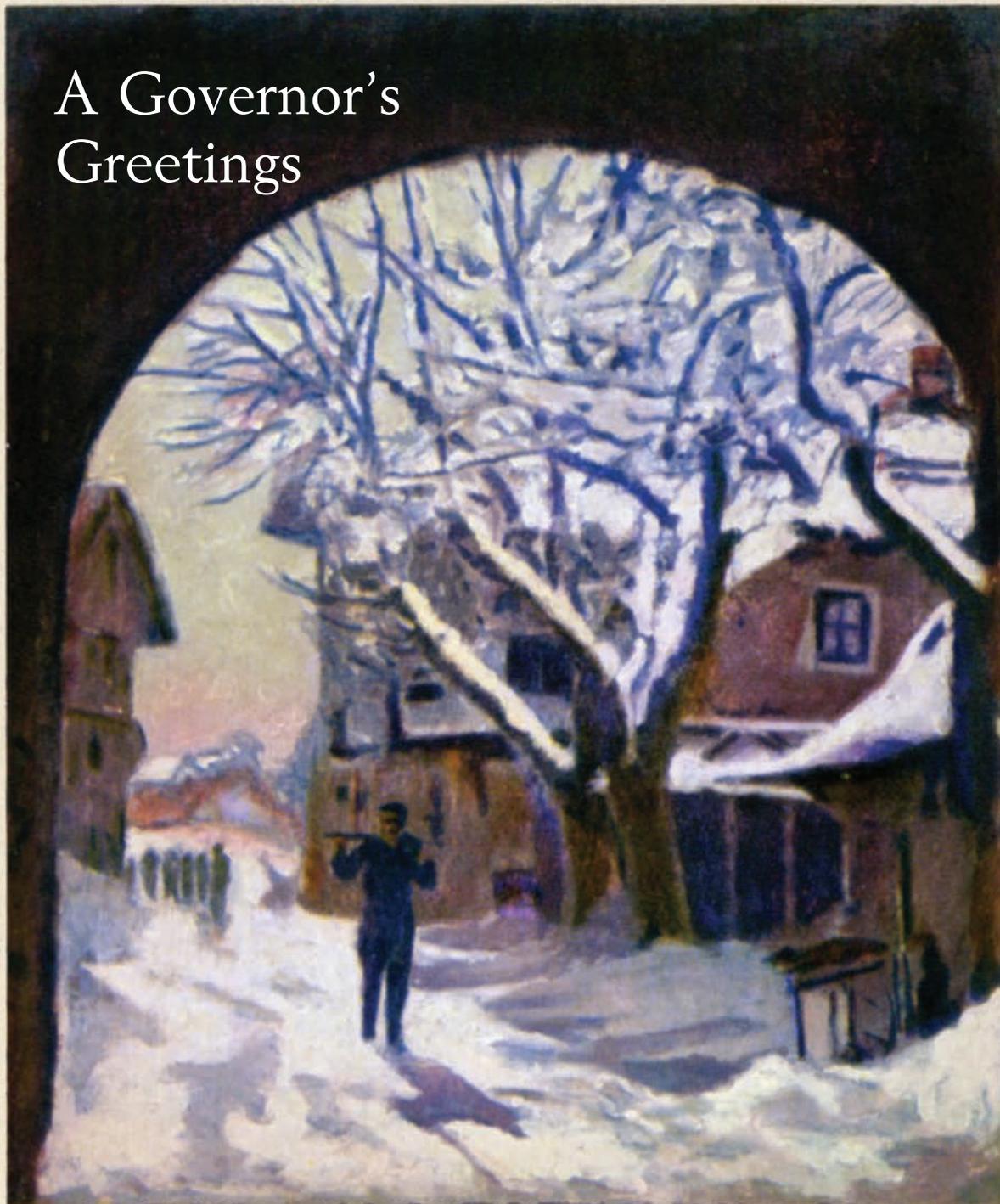
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A Governor's
Greetings



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Gubernatorial



The Harrimans received cards from the Kennedys and the Roosevelts.

Holiday cards to a governor came from famous and regular folks.

The gubernatorial files of W. Averell Harriman (1891-1986) contain many records which reveal the inner workings of the Executive Chamber between 1955 and 1958 when he was governor. However, a group of documents within this collection delves deeper below the surface and sheds light

on his personal life: The Christmas cards he received while in office.

Before becoming governor of New York, Harriman served prominent roles in the arena of foreign policy as Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Soviet Union, and later as Secretary of Commerce. His circle of friends and acquaintances

included many figures of international significance. This collection of holiday cards affirms his place in this elite circle. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that these cards could serve as an index to notable names of the twentieth century.

Among the names appearing on these cards are those of John F. Kennedy, whose handwritten signature appears on a card sent to Harriman during the 1958 Christmas season. Eleanor Roosevelt,

Greetings

BY ANASTASIA O'NEILL



Comedian Bob Hope, King Paul of Greece, and fashion designer Christian Dior sent cards.

too, sent a holiday greeting to the governor in 1955. Both Kennedy and Roosevelt shared close political connections with the governor. However, Harriman also had connections with many famous individuals outside the realm of politics. Among them was Bob Hope, who sent multiple Christmas cards custom-illustrated by cartoonist Ted Sally. Fashion designer Christian Dior's holiday card can be found among those received by Governor and Mrs. Harriman in 1955. Harriman was even in touch with royalty from around the globe. In fact, he

was familiar enough with King Paul of Greece to have received a hand-signed Christmas card featuring a relaxed group photo of the Greek royal family.

Whether they were celebrities or ordinary citizens, the senders of these cards shared the details of their lives in various ways. Many, like the Greek royal family, sent family





Cards from Winston Churchill and US diplomat Robert Coe featured their own paintings.



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portraits. Others sent photos of their homes or lengthy newsletters. Some of the most noteworthy cards, however, are those from the numerous artists connected with Governor and Mrs. Harriman, who were avid art collectors. Many of these artists seized the opportunity to share their talents by sending cards embellished with their own artwork.

One such card features the work of a man known first and foremost for his political accomplishments rather than his artistic ones. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, however, was a talented

amateur artist and a close acquaintance of Harriman. His annual Christmas cards to the governor feature his own paintings. A custom-printed message sending Churchill's "Christmas thoughts and wishes" appears inside instead of a signature, but the cards nonetheless seem distinctly personal, highlighting a leisurely pastime enjoyed in moments of privacy.

Churchill was not the only statesman who turned to painting in his free time. Robert Coe, a lifelong diplomat, shared a similar interest in painting. The cover of his

1955 Christmas Card displays one of his own paintings. At the time, Coe was serving as US Ambassador to Denmark. His painting, which depicts the American Embassy in Copenhagen, serves to highlight Coe's role in international relations.

In contrast to the tranquil paintings of Churchill and Coe stand the dynamic illustrations of cartoonist Rube Goldberg, another connection of Harriman's. While best known for his cartoons of arcane machines, Goldberg also designed his own Christmas cards. In 1955,



A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year all wrapped up in a nice neat package from us to you -

IRMA AND
RUBE GOLDBERG
1958

MERRY MERRY



Grandma Moses,

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Cards from the Goldbergs and the Moynihans featured lighthearted drawings. Grandma Moses's card showed a snowy New York scene.

THE WIND IN WINTER. 1950. OIL ON PRESSED WOOD. 20" X 24" (50.8 X 61CM). COPYRIGHT © 1950 (RENEWED 1978) GRANDMA MOSES PROPERTIES CO., NEW YORK.

Goldberg sent a card humorously depicting Santa Claus discovering his own impostors. "A real Merry Christmas for '55 and a real Happy New Year for '56" is printed below this image. These appropriately jolly words complement Goldberg's playful illustration, resulting in a card brimming with personality.

Goldberg was not the only artist to send greetings featuring lighthearted illustration. Daniel P. Moynihan likewise sent a particularly cheerful card to Harriman in 1955. Long before becoming a US Senator, Moynihan served as

an assistant in Governor Harriman's Executive Chamber. The illustration on his Christmas card is not the work of Moynihan himself, but that of his wife. Elizabeth Moynihan's signature appears beneath the caricature on the cover of this card, which may perhaps be a representation of herself and her husband.

A small, rather unassuming card among those received by Harriman in 1958 presents a classic scene of New York's snowy countryside. The striking signature inside is that of the scene's painter: Grandma Moses. Her handwritten

signature shows the preeminence of Moses' works: her paintings were reproduced so frequently that custom-printing her own cards was unnecessary. Though she added no other handwritten message, perhaps she intended to remind the Governor of their shared home state's scenic beauty.

Few artists enjoyed the fame that Grandma Moses possessed in her time, but even lesser-known artists had close connections with Governor and Mrs. Harriman. Painter Charles Baskerville, for example, would have been well-known to the governor

A small, rather unassuming card among those received by Harriman in 1958 presents a classic scene of New York's snowy countryside.



Painter Charles Baskerville's card depicts a Biblical scene. Beth Foley, a young New York resident, sent a message of appreciation for Christmas, 1958.

He also received hundreds of cards from ordinary citizens who sent their good wishes and often wrote messages reflecting on his gubernatorial administration.

as a portraitist who had depicted society elites such as Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney. Baskerville's Christmas card, which depicts a Biblical scene, shows his interest in other artistic subjects. Inside, a handwritten message addresses Governor and Mrs. Harriman by first name only, signifying the familiarity of their relationship with Baskerville.

World leaders, historical figures, and talented artists were not the only people who sent holiday greetings to Governor Harriman. He also received hundreds of cards from ordinary citizens who sent their good wishes and often wrote messages reflecting on his gubernatorial

administration. Among the most endearing of these messages are those from children, such as that of Beth Foley. Her Christmas letter, sent as Harriman's administration was nearing its end in 1958, assures him that "I think you've been a very good Governer [sic]." Even amidst cards from famous names, this letter stands out as a heartfelt message of

Christmas cheer.

These examples represent only a small fraction of the treasures found in "Governor Harriman's Christmas Cards," part of his Central Subject and Correspondence Files held at the New York State Archives. A finding aid to this collection is available at http://iarchives.nysed.gov/xtf/view?docId=ead/findingaids/13682_07.xml ■